
WALT WHITMAN
QUARTERLY REVIEW

Volume 8 | Number 1 (1990) pps. 53-55

Miller, James E. Jr. Walt Whitman (Updated Edition) [review]

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ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)
ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

Recommended Citation
Folsom, Ed. "Miller, James E. Jr. Walt Whitman (Updated Edition) [review]." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 8 (Summer 1990), 53-55. https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1276

stand back with the sound advice of an elder brother. In fact, with Stafford at least he apparently stood on excellent social terms with the young man's parents—leading us to wonder about the exact nature of the relationship. That Whitman required "lovers" there is no doubt; that he also needed to retain, or regain, his brotherly composure with them is also plausible. As he told one of his soldiers years after the war: "you seem very dear to me . . . like some young brother who has been lost, but now found."

Naturally, no selected edition can substitute for a full one, but this book will serve as an excellent introduction to Whitman. Though there are places where additional annotation would aid clarity, these are rare exceptions to a marvellously well-equipped edition of letters. It is a tribute (one of the many) to Professor Miller's distinguished career in Whitman studies and elsewhere.

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JAMES E. MILLER, JR. *Walt Whitman.* Updated Edition. Boston: Twayne, 1990. xvi + 174 pp.

This classic entry in Twayne's United States Authors Series was originally published in 1962. Professor Miller has now revised his book, and while it remains substantially the same, he has made some small but significant changes and additions to take into account what has happened in Whitman scholarship over the past three decades. In an engaging preface (where he recalls that his original introduction to Whitman came as an undergraduate in 1939 when he read what turned out to be a bowdlerized version of "Song of Myself"), Miller characterizes his revisions as "detailed throughout, in the sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, but only with the purposes of correcting errors and bringing the bibliography and the frame of reference up to date" (p. x). Not only has the frame of reference been brought up to date, however, so has the overall presentation: Miller's revision can, among other things, be read as a study of the emerging awareness of the necessity for nonsexist usage of language. Compare these two passages, the first from the original version of the book:

> Man was, after all, the supreme fact for Whitman. The universe of *Leaves* is man-centered, even though there is full acceptance of science which paradoxically proves otherwise. It is only natural that one of Whitman's most frequently recurring images should be the populous city—the dwelling place of man en masse. And the detail that appears almost invariably—the sidewalk or pavement—suggests not man comfortably situated in his home but man in movement, energetic and creative, traveling the open, and endless, road.

Now the same passage from the revised version:

> Men and women were, after all, the supreme fact for Whitman. The universe of *Leaves* is human-centered, even though there is full acceptance of science which paradoxically

proves otherwise. It is only natural that one of Whitman's most frequently recurring images should be the populous city—the dwelling place of individuals en masse. And the detail that appears almost invariably—the sidewalk or pavement—suggests not individuals comfortably situated in their homes but people in movement, energetic and creative, traveling the open, and endless, road. (p. 118)

Such revisions demonstrate how nonsexist usage can be accomplished gracefully, with no loss of accuracy and in fact with a significant gain in precision of expression. After all these years, our criticism about Whitman is finally beginning to sound as nonsexist as Whitman's own writing.

It is fitting, then, that Whitman's attempts at gender inclusiveness get more attention in the revised version of this book than in the original: after noting that the *Children of Adam* poems capture Whitman's "new perceptions into the meaning of human relationships," Miller now adds a passage suggesting the significant work done in the past decade on Whitman's attitude toward gender: "In claiming to be the 'poet of the woman the same as the man,' Whitman was extending his theme of equality and democratic reach to embrace difference in sex as he had extended it to embrace difference in race, religion, and heritage" (p. 64). Then Miller goes on to note the continuing controversy about Whitman's construction of gender difference:

Whitman was serious and persistent as well as bold in his attempt to be inclusive. But what was an advanced position for him in the nineteenth century has become a controversial position in the twentieth. . . . In the reference to "mother of men" [in "Song of Myself"], some readers will see Whitman as celebrating women's unique biological role, while others will see his reference as one-dimensional and partronizing.

Miller also updates, even if he does not essentially change, his view of Whitman's homoerotic relationships. In the original edition, after admitting the possibility that the inspiration for *Leaves of Grass* may have been "a close male comradeship," Miller ultimately dismissed the speculation: "But in spite of the scrutiny of Whitman's life, no record of a relationship has turned up to supply the missing link, and it is doubtful that one will be discovered in the future." In the revised edition, the dismissal remains, but it is significantly modified by a new passage:

A number of the close male relationships in Whitman's life—with the horse-car conductor Peter Doyle, with Sergeant Thomas P. Sawyer during the Civil War, with Harry Stafford, illiterate son of a farmer at Timber Creek where Whitman spent time outdoors to regain his health in his later years, and with others—have been documented by Whitman's biographers and critics and have revealed that Whitman's attachments to male friends could be as deep and complicated as those between lovers. But no single relationship has been discovered that could mark the beginning of his inspiration as a poet, and it is doubtful one will be discovered in the future. (p. 31)

The notes to this passage then guide the reader to recent work on Whitman's sexuality by Justin Kaplan, Harold Aspiz, Paul Zweig, and Charley Shively.

This kind of modification occurs repeatedly in the revision; Miller's main ideas do not change, but they come to sound less adamant, less stable, as a result of the work of the last twenty-five years.

Some of that work, of course, has been accomplished by Professor Miller himself, and he concludes the revised edition with a new coda—"An Original American Poetry: The Lyric Epic"—that summarizes his own 1979 book, *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction: Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic.* Just as the original edition had concluded with a mini-version of Miller's *Start With the Sun: Studies in the Whitman Tradition* (1960), emphasizing Whitman's influence on the work of Lawrence, Hart Crane, and Dylan Thomas, so now Miller ends by suggesting, as he did in *American Quest,* that Whitman's legacy is much more varied and that his influence is heard in the work of poets like Pound, Eliot, Williams, Olson, Berryman, Ginsberg, Zukofsky, and Ammons.

With small errors now corrected (the longstanding confusion over the number of editions of *Leaves* is cleared up simply and directly), with controversial areas of Whitman scholarship highlighted and readers directed to recent key studies that explore those areas, and with a useful new annotated bibliography, Miller's *Walt Whitman* is, once again, a reliable and suggestive introduction to the poet and his work.

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